



# Military Spouses Talking Points

## Overview

- The Women's Bureau is a federal agency housed within the U.S. Department of Labor.
- Established in 1920, the Women's Bureau is the only federal agency tasked with focusing exclusively on working women.
- The Bureau works to safeguard the interests of working women, advocate for their equality and economic security, and promote quality work environments.
- As part of its work, the Women's Bureau collaborates with government, private, non-profit, educational, and labor partners to support growing employment opportunities for military spouses.
- Since 2017, more than 5.4 million jobs have been created in the United States, as of April 2019.
- In April 2019, the unemployment rate for adult women was the lowest since 1953 at 3.1%.<sup>1</sup>
- With the United States economy thriving and job creation continuing to grow at a steady pace, Women's Bureau is continuously evaluating ways to help Americans enter and grow within the workforce.
- A key constituency identified is military spouses. Military spouses come from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds and bring a diverse set of skills to the labor force. They also make many sacrifices to protect our country and ensure prosperity.
- Often overlooked are the sacrifices military spouses face when trying to secure a job or grow their careers. As a result, the employment statistics among military spouses trend below average:
  - ✓ 92% of military spouses are women;<sup>2</sup>
  - ✓ 53% of military spouses participated in the labor market, compared to 76% of the general population;<sup>3</sup>
  - ✓ 13% of military spouses are unemployed, which is approximately three times the rate of men and women nationally.<sup>4</sup>
- Military spouses are a skilled, diverse, motivated, and educated group:
  - ✓ 89% of military spouses having some college education;<sup>5</sup>
  - ✓ 30% of military spouses have a four-year degree, while 15% have an advanced degree;<sup>6</sup>
  - ✓ 34% of military spouses work in occupations that require licenses.<sup>7</sup>
- The employment and knowledge base statistics for military spouses outline a pathway to opportunity, which is one of the many reasons supporting military spouses is an important part of the U.S. Department of Labor's efforts to expand opportunities for the American worker.

## Key Issues Affecting Working Women

- Before reviewing ways the Women's Bureau and the U.S. Department of Labor have started to take steps to advance military spouse participation in the workforce, it is important to consider a few key issues.
  - ✓ **Unemployment vs. Underemployment:** 31.6% of military spouses are employed part-time, but may prefer full-time work.<sup>8</sup>
  - ✓ **Occupational Licenses:** 34% of employed military spouses work in occupations that require licenses. Typically, military families move frequently, and find it difficult to transfer licenses from state to state, delaying their return to the workforce.<sup>9</sup>



- ✓ **Informal/Non-Compensated Work:** Military spouses often perform informal or non-compensated work, which might not always make it to their resumes but adds value to their skill-set.
- ✓ **Dispelling Myths Among Employers:** It is important that employers have the facts regarding military spouses and the labor force.
  - For example, many employers raise concerns about hiring military spouses because they move frequently due to reassignment.
  - The truth is, military spouse employment tenure is largely in-line with the general population.
  - In fact, Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows that the average tenure for an employee in the general workforce is 4.2 years. For Millennials (that is, the 25-34 age group), the median tenure is 2.8 years.<sup>10</sup>

## Women's Bureau Work in Action

- As part of the Women's Bureau efforts to help advance solutions to creating more family-sustaining jobs and expanding career opportunities for women, the Bureau plays a key role in convening stakeholders and establishing partnerships to assist military spouses to enter the workforce and grow their careers.
- Most recently, with help from the Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS), the Women's Bureau held a series of listening sessions across the country to hear directly from the military spouse community and better understand the employment challenges facing them.
- Last year, VETS launched a dedicated online portal for military spouses, featuring a range of helpful employment resources including information on transferring occupational licenses (Military Spouse Portal: <https://www.veterans.gov/milspouses/>).
- As part of the Military Spouse Portal, the Women's Bureau collaborated with VETS to release the Military Spouse Interstate License Recognition Options interactive map, which provides a centralized platform for the patchwork of interstate recognition options to assist military spouses with planning their next career step when relocating.
- The Women's Bureau is also working with VETS to design a targeted Transition Assistance Program specifically for military spouses relocating to a new station with their service member or transitioning to civilian life:
  - ✓ This curriculum will be separate from the one designed for the service members and will help transitioning military spouses to successfully navigate the job market and continue building meaningful careers.

## Administration Initiatives

- Recognizing the contributions military spouses have made to our Nation, the White House has focused efforts on helping military spouses expand career opportunities for the Nation's overall economic well-being, as well as the retention of the highly-skilled, experienced military personnel.
- In fact, on May 9, 2018, President Trump signed Executive Order Enhancing Noncompetitive Civil Service Appointments of Military Spouses, to promote the hiring of and enhance employment support for military spouses.<sup>11</sup>
  - ✓ The Executive Order directed all federal agencies to ensure military spouses have greater access to federal employment opportunities; and
  - ✓ Moved federal departments and agencies across the government to incorporate such provisions into their hiring and talent retention practices.



- Another major area of work for this Administration has been occupational licensing reform, which directly benefits military spouses that move from state to state while advancing their careers.
  - ✓ Last year, the U.S. Department of Labor distributed nearly \$7 million in grants to help states review and streamline their occupational licensing rules.
  - ✓ These investments support selected states' analysis of relevant licensing criteria, potential portability issues, and whether licensing requirements are overly broad or burdensome.<sup>12</sup>
  - ✓ In line with the Administration's efforts, Congress passed the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act. This would allow states to use federal education funds to identify and examine licenses or certifications that "pose an unwarranted barrier to entry into the workforce."<sup>13</sup>
  - ✓ President Trump signed the bill into law on July 31, 2018.

## Talking Point Sources

<sup>1</sup> "Statement by U.S. Secretary of Labor Acosta on April Jobs Report." U.S. Department of Labor, May 3, 2019: <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/osec/osec20190503>

<sup>2</sup> "2017 Demographics Profile of the Military Community." Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy: <http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2017-demographics-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> "Military Spouse Demographics and Employment Information." White House, 2018: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DoDMilitarySpouseDemographicsandEmployment\\_20180912.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DoDMilitarySpouseDemographicsandEmployment_20180912.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> "2017 Survey of Active Duty Spouses." Office of People Analytics, Department of Defense, 2019: <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/2017-Survey-of-Active-Duty-Spouses-Overview-Briefing.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> "2017 Survey of Active Duty Spouses." Office of People Analytics, Department of Defense, 2019: <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/2017-Survey-of-Active-Duty-Spouses-Overview-Briefing.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> "2017 Survey of Active Duty Spouses." Office of People Analytics, Department of Defense, 2019: <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/2017-Survey-of-Active-Duty-Spouses-Overview-Briefing.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> "Military Spouse Demographics and Employment Information." White House, 2018: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DoDMilitarySpouseDemographicsandEmployment\\_20180912.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DoDMilitarySpouseDemographicsandEmployment_20180912.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> "Military Spouses in the Labor Market." The Council of Economic Advisers, White House, May 2018: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Military-Spouses-in-the-Labor-Market.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> "Military Spouse Demographics and Employment Information." White House, 2018: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DoDMilitarySpouseDemographicsandEmployment\\_20180912.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DoDMilitarySpouseDemographicsandEmployment_20180912.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> "Employee Tenure in 2018." Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, September 20, 2018 <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/tenure.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> "Executive Order Enhancing Noncompetitive Civil Service Appointments of Military Spouses." White House, May 9, 2018: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-enhancing-noncompetitive-civil-service-appointments-military-spouses>

<sup>12</sup> "U.S. Department of Labor Awards \$7 Million to States to Support Occupational Licensing Reform." U.S. Department of Labor, June 25, 2018: <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20180625>

<sup>13</sup> "Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act." Congress.Gov, July 31, 2018: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2353>